

Bringing My Freedom into Play



Photograph of Bethany Hamilton and Nicky Vucijic

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“...you were called to freedom...”

Ga 5:13

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“You were called to freedom...”

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Take a look at these photographs!



Paraplegic tennis player



Surfer with one arm

Singer-guitarist without arms



Public speaker with no arms or legs



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1 What do these people seem to have in common?



Physically: _____

In what they do: _____

Describe the feeling that these images provoke:

2 Now, make 4 groups. Each group will receive a handout containing a brief biography of one of the people shown in the photographs. Each group will need to research the biography that they receive and resent it to the rest of the class.

After the presentations, you can watch the videos suggested below:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WynbEISNAmM>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GF9wo9sVn2c>



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IH0bCTF--gE>



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CM_eHJcdjig



Bringing My Freedom into Play

Esther Vergeer.

Plays tennis in a wheelchair.



She was born in Holland in 1981. When she was six years old she felt sick after going swimming. After a lot of medical tests, she underwent an operation, and at eight years old and was left paralyzed from the waist down.

In physical therapy she learned how to play volleyball, basketball and tennis in a wheelchair. "I stopped thinking about everything that I couldn't do anymore and I focused on what I could do. I believe this is what saved me life".

She didn't plan on devoting her life to sports. She had enough to do rebuilding her life. She started playing basketball because there was a team that practiced next-door to her house. She also played tennis for fun. "Accepting my wheelchair and making a place for it in all of this, in my new life".

She decided to choose tennis, rather than basketball, as her sport. "I wrote down the pros and cons of both and my conclusion was that tennis represented a greater challenge for me". A challenge in which she has truly triumphed.



At 31 years old, she abandoned the tennis court, leaving behind infinite titles, having become a world tennis champion.

"My career was crazy. I am very proud of my results and my titles, and I can look back and feel great about it. But continuing wouldn't have brought me anything, it wasn't going to add anything more. The circle was closed."

She doesn't compete anymore, but she is still connected to tennis.

She has a lot of projects: her own Foundation, which helps Disabled children practice sports, and conferences where she talks about her experience.

She refuses to give up fishing, skiing, or sailing with her boyfriend, and continues to enjoy her life.



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Tony Meléndez
Singer-Guitarist



He was born in Nicaragua on January 9, 1962. His mother took a medication (Thalidomide) during pregnancy that caused birth defects, and he was born without arms. His family moved to Los Angeles due to the precarious health conditions in their native country, and had prosthetic arms made for him. "I didn't feel comfortable. I could do so much more with my feet".



His abilities using his feet allowed him to cope in more than just the usual areas. He started to play the keyboard, and his father gave him his first guitar lessons. Tony never let his disability be a disadvantage. He practiced six hours a day until he could play well.

"When children would see my they would yell, 'He doesn't have arms!' and it hurt my heart. It hurt very much".

He is currently married and has two adopted children. They live in Missouri. "I always dreamed about getting married, but when I was younger girls would get scared off: 'Oh, a boy without arms!' My wife is everything. She is my strength".

On September 15, 1987 he sang "Never be the same" for Pope John Paul II in front of 6,000 young people. The Pope went up to the platform where he was, kissed him and congratulated him: "Tony, you are truly a brave young man. You are giving hope to us all. My desire for you, is that you continue giving hope to everyone". He also wrote a book called, *A Gift of Hope*.



He has received numerous awards, including special recognition from President Reagan, the State of California, various clubs in America, the City of Los Angeles, and many other civic and charitable associations.

"Music opened the door to my dreams and I will continue to sing, sharing my life, and writing music for everyone."

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Bethany Hamilton
Surfer



She was born on February 8, 1990 in Kauai, Hawaii. Her parents were surfers and taught her to surf at the age of 4. She participated in her first competition when she was 8 years old. Her professional surfing career began when she on the 23rd annual Haleiwa Menehune championship in February of 2000, taking 1st place in the categories of women 11 and under and women 15 and under, and 2nd place in the men 12 and under category. "I could see that it was going to be my professional career, and it seemed promising".



On the morning of October 31, 2003, Hamilton went out surfing and a tiger shark tore off her left arm. She was 200 yards from the shore. She lost a lot of blood. "I didn't have much time to think. I just knew that I had to make it to the shore in order to survive".

"At 13 years old I had dreams and goals. But I didn't know if I would be able to surf again".

Only 10 weeks after the accident, she began surfing again. She adapted a handmade board that was a little bit thicker, making it easier for her to swim. After learning how to swim with one arm, she began to full-out surf.

"I wanted to keep surfing. I was waiting on the doctors' orders to let me get back in the water. When I got in, it was an incredible experience".



Two years after losing her arm, she won 1st place in the NSSA world championship. Now she is married, and continues to compete and enjoy surfing.

"When the shark attacked me I became famous. It wasn't something that I wanted. But that's what happened. Surfing and TV have given me the opportunity to remind many people that we need to be aware of the opportunities that we have so that we can

share the love of God and be a light in the world".



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Nicky Vucijic
Public Speaker-Communicator
Actor in the short film,
"The Butterfly Circus"



He was born in Australia on December 4, 1982, without arms or legs. He only has a small formation on his inferior left side.

Initially his parents were devastated about his disability, but were thankful that at least he was healthy. During elementary school, Nicky and his family moved to Melbourne in search of better opportunities. But the State of Victoria wouldn't allow him to attend a normal school due to his physical disability.



Later on, Australian state laws changed, and Nicky became one of the first disabled students to attend a regular school. Nicky experienced episodes of depression during his childhood. *"When I started going to school, a lot of kids would make fun of me and underestimate me. It was very hard to find friends"*.

When he was about 8 years old he thought about committing suicide. *"I was depressed. I had thoughts of suicide because of everything that I didn't have and couldn't do in my life. The love of my parents kept me from doing it. I loved them a lot and they hadn't done anything but love me"*.

After praying numerous times to be able to grow arms and legs, he began to feel grateful for his life, and realized that he had exceptional abilities to be able to face certain types of challenges. He discovered that his life could be an inspiration to others.



Nicky graduated when he was 21 years old, majoring in Accounting and Financial Planning. He began to travel as a motivational speaker, focusing on topics that concern young people. He participated in the short film "The Butterfly Circus".



Nicky married Kanae Miyahara in February of 2012. Their first child was born the following year, totally healthy. In 2013 he participated in a Christian film called *"Hope for Hurting Hearts"*. He continues to give witness at conferences.

"Without arms, but with a lot of love for my son".

BUILDING UP LOVE

Bringing My Freedom into Play

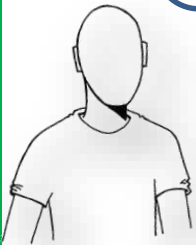
3 Each group should prepare some questions to discuss with the class. Then, answer the following questions:



1. What did you think of each story?
2. What caught your attention the most?
3. Do you believe that they felt sad sometimes? Why?
4. Would they have liked to be formed differently, or to not have had their accidents?
5. What was their attitude in front of the difficulties that they were presented with in life?
6. What made them move forward? Did they choose for themselves?
7. What other choices could they have made?
8. Do you believe that other people in similar circumstances would have acted in the same way?
9. Do you think that we are sometimes capable of doing more than we actually do? If so, why don't we do more?
10. Do you think their limitations deprived them of their freedom?

Reflect:

The lives of these people, their testimony of love, and their fight lead us to discover that it is necessary to love oneself in order to be free, instead feeling sorry for oneself about a physical or psychological limitation. Sometimes we get knocked down and we lose hope because of little setbacks or because things don't turn out how we wanted. Nonetheless, there are people who truly suffer, who are sick or who have serious problems, and who are happy in spite of it all.



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- 4 After enjoying these testimonials, we invite you to answer these questions about freedom:

Do you think that freedom is simply received and enjoyed, or do you think that somehow we are bringing something into play with our freedom?

What does this mean: "*When we live, we are bringing our freedom into play*"?

- 5 We invite you to make this question your own: How do you bring your freedom into play every day? Give concrete examples from your daily life.

I bring my freedom into play when...	
I bring my freedom into play when...	
I bring my freedom into play when...	
I bring my freedom into play when...	
I bring my freedom into play when...	
I bring my freedom into play when...	
I bring my freedom into play when...	

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6 To conclude, we invite you to reflect on the following questions:

Do you think that Esther, Tony, Bethany and Nicky would have been truly free if they had made a different choice?

Does being truly free lead us to choose what is best for ourselves?

Bringing my freedom into play is responding to a call from my reason and my will, always attentive to my heart.

It is listening to that voice inscribed in my heart that calls out:

Get up! Stop!

Keep going! Fight!

Be grateful! Resist!

Enjoy! Put up with it!

Receive! Give!

LOVE!

To be free is to be capable of receiving my life as a GIFT, as a PRESENT.

To be free I need to accept my body, my whole PERSON, and to accept it as a gift that allows me to creatively communicate with others, according to the language of love.

I am free and I bring my freedom into play!

